

A
S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D

Before the
King & Queen,

A T
W H I T E - H A L L,

In November 1692.

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Dean of *Gloucester*,
and Chaplain in Ordinary to their Majesties.

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King of the North



PSAL. CXIX. 106.

*I have sworn, and I will perform it, that
I will keep thy righteous Judgments.*

THE Prophet *David* spends this whole Psalm, partly in recounting his own misfortunes, partly in magnifying the study, and meditation of God's Law, as the greatest comfort, and refreshment, that he met with in all his distresses, and persecutions. He enlarges throughout upon the excellency, the necessity, and advantages thereof, that the true and only felicity of man attainable in this life depends upon it, and that so great was the satisfaction, so chearful the reflections he derived from it, that all the pressures and afflictions of the world were not able to make him miserable. He frequently declares the high esteem, and value, that he had for it, his stedfast resolutions to continue, and persevere in the observance of it, together with a constant intermixture of his

earnest and fervent Prayers for Gods Grace , and assistance to enable him so to doe.

In this verse we have a noble expression, of an Holy and Courageous resolution, flowing from the conviction of his Judgment, and deeply rooted in his heart, *I have sworn, and I will perform it*, or as the other translation has it, *I have sworn, and am steadfastly purposed to keep thy righteous Judgments.* i. e. By my admission into the number of thy people I am entered into a solemn Sacramental Covenant to perform obedience to thy Commands, I do now acknowledge my self indispensably engaged to thy Service, and withal renew my vows, and resolutions never to depart from it.

Ham-
mond in
loc.

The only inference I shall make from the words at present shall be only to shew , of what great use, benefit, and advantage it is in the business of religion to lay down fixed, and steady resolutions to undertake it, and to pursue the designs of it with the whole bent, and bias of the Soul. And thus we find the Saints in Scripture have usually devoted themselves to the service of their God. Thus *David* in another place, *my heart is fixed O God my heart is fixed*, Ps. 57. 7. Thus *Mattathias* 1. Mac. 2. 19. *Tho all the Nations under the Kings Dominions shall fall every one from the Religion of their Fathers, yet will I and my sons and my*
brethren

brethren walk in the Covenant of our Fathers. Thus those in *Jer. 51. 5.* *Come let us joyn our selves to the Lord in a perpetual Covenant, that shall not be forgotten.* And this *Barnabas* recommends to the Converts at *Antioch Acts 11. 23.* *that with full purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* A certain velleity, a languid and incomplete will, some zealous pang of devotion, may be discern'd in *Ahab*, and *Herod*, *Balaam* and *Agrippa*; I am almost persuaded to be a *Christian*, says one, and *O that I might dye the death of the righteous*, says another; but they were still destitute of the true foundation of religion, a strong, firm, and well bottomed resolution; they had not wrought their hearts to the Psalmists conclusion, *I have sworn, and am steadfastly purposed to keep thy righteous Judgments.* In discoursing of this point I shall shew

First What is required to the forming a firm and settled resolution,

Secondly The great moment and importance of such a resolution in the business of religion.

And 1. of the First of these, what is required to the forming a firm and settled resolution. And here first it is requisite that it be the result and issue of a mature, and serious deliberation. Now deliberation is an act or exercise of the practical Judgment, or understanding,

employ'd and set on work by the will to consult, and debate the proper means conducive to the end, together with a due weighing and balancing the several conveniencies, and inconveniencies that attend them. This is the work of deliberation in general, and is of very great moment throughout all the actions of our lives.

In the present Case it is a thorow, and impartial consideration of the Duties, and difficulties of Religion, the pleasures of sin for a season, and the bitterness of them in the event, and issue; a due comparing of rewards and punishments, the present, and the future, the sweetness of a good Conscience, and the torments of a bad, the beauties of virtue, and the deformity of sin, the shortness of time, and the length of Eternity: till upon a fair representation of the whole Series of things to our own minds, we have at length brought the debate to this determination, that all the advantage lies on the side of religion; that the reward of obedience has infinitely more weight to persuade, than all the hardships we must grapple with have to dishearten, and discourage us; that there is no proportion between a moment and eternity; and that all the pleasures, profits, and honours of the World are of no account at all, when they are laid in the ballance with the everlasting concerns of our immortal Souls.

This

This method of the workings of our own minds in forming a settled resolution, Divines have very fitly represented by *Joshuas* dealing with the Children of *Israel* *Jos. 24.* where he summons the people together, and plainly sets before them the great obligations they lay under to forsake all strange Gods, and faithfully adhere to the Worship and Service of the God of *Israel*. He represents to them on the one hand, what great things God had done for them, and what greater things he would still doe, if they continued steadfast in his Covenant. On the other hand he acquaints them with the difficulty of God's Service, the accurate purity, and strictness which was required for the performance *v. 19. Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an Holy God.* To this he adds the dreadful Judgments, he would bring upon them in case they should transgress his Covenant, and goe and serve other Gods, *for he is a jealous God, he will not pardon your transgressions, nor your sins* And at last after a great many arguments to this purpose, and those repeated and inculcated to make the stronger impression upon their minds, he refers the matter to their own choice *v. 15. If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day, whom you will serve.* Not that he hereby set them perfectly at liberty, as if it were a matter indifferent, whether they serv'd God, or Idols

Idols. For his whole design had bin hitherto to confirm them, and their posterity for ever in the worship of the true God, and in Case they had revolted from it, he would never have suffer'd their Apostacy to go unpunished. In the words therefore he eloquently insinuates to them the gross inequality of the Comparison, that being stir'd up with indignation at so vile a choice, as the preferring dumb Idols before the living God, they might the more easily, and of their own accord yield an explicit consent to his proposal, totally renounce, and detest all false worship, and adhere to the true Religion with their utmost vigor and resolution. And this effect it had upon them *v. 15. God forbid, say they, that we should forsake the Lord to serve other Gods,* and *v. 21. Nay but we will serve the Lord.* Whereupon, for the greater solemnity of the whole transaction, *Joshua* sets up a stone as a memorial to them of the obligations they lay under, and also a testimony against them, if ever they fell off from such a deliberate resolution.

And surely whoever undertakes the business of religion, will be sensible in a little time, that it required, and needed the most solemn and serious deliberation. He will soon find it to be an enterprize, that will engage his whole strength and all his powers for the achieve-

chievement of it, that it is a work of difficulty, as well as importance, and accordingly represented in Scripture under the harsh names of Mortification, and Crucifixion; that it is a striving to enter into *the straight Gate* and *walking in the narrow way* the subduing our most forcible inclinations, *the cutting off a right hand, and the plucking out a right eye*, an utter detesting of the dearest, closest, and most affectionate lusts, and the denying our selves some of the most pleasant gratifications of flesh, and blood.

He will quickly experience the frailty, fickleness, and inconstancy of his will, the subtilty of Satan, the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery, and falshood of his own heart, the snares that are laid for him, the dangers that surround him, the enemies that lye in wait for him, the temptations from within, and from without, that are by one means or other alwaies thrusting him upon his ruin.

And when he has but slightly considered this, he will need no argument to convince him, that all his most specious and glittering resolutions, will quickly vanish and come to nothing, unless they are founded in a deep sense of the importance of the duty, of the motives, and arguments to embrace it, together with the labour he must undergoe, the delays he must sustain, and the discouragements

ments he must meet with in the discharge of it. The want hereof is the true, and immediate Cause of most of those shameful Apostacys, which have caused the enemies of God to blaspheme, and made the way of truth to be evil spoken of, when men *beginning in the spirit, have ended in the flesh, and after they have known the way of righteousness turn'd from the Holy Commandment delivered unto them.* Many there are, that are sometimes in a good mood, in a fit of devotion, when their hearts are warm'd with some affectionate discourse, when they are surprized with some sad accident or disaster, which disappoints them of the pleasure that they expected from iniquity, or when God lays siege to them by Sicknes, or some other pinching affliction, so that the provisions of lust have lost their relish with them for the present, and the calamity has embitter'd the pleasantness of the temptation. In this case it is very usual with men to be very liberal in their promises, Covenants, and resolutions. But when the fit is over, when Gods hand is taken off, and the allurements of sin grow strong enough to present themselves again, they unravel all their former vows, the heart returns to its old byas, and upon the approach of the next temptation, their *goodness vanishes like a morning Cloud, and like the early Dew, it passeth away.*

When

When *Nebuchadnezar* laid Siege against *Jerusalem Jer. 34.* the *Jews* made a solemn Covenant with the Lord to set free their servants, but no sooner had the King removed his siege, but they retracted, and repealed their vows, and brought their servants back again into their former bondage.

And the reason hereof is plain. For in such a Case the motive of their resolution is not adequate to the matter they resolve upon, the foundation is too narrow for the superstructure, and where the principle is particular and temporary, it can never be a sufficient ground of a general, and constant resolution. A resolution that arises from the sense of a present evil, or the fear of an approaching danger, will ordinarily last no longer, than the calamity that occasioned it. And so as mens fears abate their virtuous resolutions fall off together with them, since that short, and transient principle, which first gave them life, is no longer able to support them. For there can be no more strength in the conclusion than in the premises, and as their motives change, their resolutions must change too. No wonder therefore if the temptations return as strong as ever, and prevail as much against the resolution, as ever the resolution prevailed against the sin.

And this is usually the fatal issue of all those

other hasty light, vain, and unsettled purposes of men, which arise from heat, or passion, or a sudden transport of zeal, or any the like principle, which is not commensurate to the whole compass, and extent of their duty. The principles are weak, and wavering, and so can beget no other, than faint, and floating resolutions.

The *Jews* Jo. 6. 15. upon the sight of our Saviors miracles were of a sudden so highly transported with love to him, that they resolv'd nothing should hinder them, but they would e'en take him by force, and make him a King. And yet at another time, when the Pharisees, who knew well enough how to doe it, had slyly insinuated into their pliable, and unresolv'd affections, they cryed out against him as against a slave *Crucify him, Crucify him*, we have *no King but Cæsar*.

This then is the difference between reason and passion in forming a good purpose, and resolution. The former does not prevent or anticipate, but slowly follows, and attends the mature Counsels of the mind; it first brings the matter to a grave, and calm deliberation, and thence wisely, and sedately proceeds to action, and execution. But the other is impatient of serious thinking, as being a tedious, and irksome task, and so setting forward too speedily without Counsel, usually comes off too cowardly without Courage.

This

This is that temper, which old *Jacob* reproves in *Reuben* his first-born *Gen.* 49. 4. *Unstable as water*, which some render rash, and hasty, others light, and inconstant; and the one is ordinarily a consequent of the other, and therefore he could *not excell*, not only in the number of his tribe *Deut.* 33. 6. but neither in valour, courage, or any excellent atchievement. The same is taxt by *Solomon Pro.* 14. 29. *he that is hasty of Spirit exalteth folly.* i. e. he makes his folly manifest to the world by rashly adventuring upon that, which when it comes to tryal, he is not able to go through with. They that are the most forward and bold in an undertaking, are often found to fall off most shamefully in the encounter, and the greatest boasters before a danger are commonly very timorous or at least inconstant, when it comes.

We have a sad example of this in no less a Person than *St. Peter*. How confident was, he in protesting, and promising and resolving that he would stick to Christ even to the death. A three-fold rashness some have observed in his behaviour in that business: he opposed himself to our Saviors forewarning him of his fall. He prefer'd himself indiscreetly before the rest of his fellow Disciples, and he took the matter wholly upon himself, as that which he thought himself upon his own strength to be well enough able to ac-

count for. *Though all should be offended, because of thee, yet would not I. I will never deny thee: though I dye for it. I will lay down my life for thy sake. I am ready to go with thee unto prison and unto death. Matt. 26. 21. Jo.*

13. 38. And what more pregnant testimony than this of his love to Christ, and resolution to adhere to him? *Greater love than this, in the Apostles Judgment, no man hath, than to lay down his life for his friend.* And this *St. Peter* had, if we may believe himself, yea he began to expresse some acts of it, when with his usual boldness, and fervency of Spirit, he manfully drew his sword in his masters quarrel. And yet all this proved nothing but a piece of gallantry, an heat, and bravery in our Apostle; he had never forcasted with himself, what might ensue, and his vain glorious resolution included a thousand particulars, which he was not aware off. For see how soon the Scene is changed. This great Champion of our Saviour is of a sudden daunted, and stricken out of countenance, he that had his name from a rock, is immediatly *shaken like a reed*; and after so solemn an engagement, and protestation not to forsake Christ, tho every one else should, he is driven from this steadfastness by the voice of a silly Damself, and was the first of all, that not only disown'd, but even with oaths and im-

imprecations deny'd, and forswore his master. Surely this was written for our admonition, and left upon record for a standing example of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, the frailty of the greatest passions, the folly of presuming upon our own strength, that *every man at his best estate is altogether vanity*, and that the deepest thoughts, and most advised consultations are all little enough to support and strengthen our resolutions.

But secondly and more particularly it is required for the forming a fixt, and steady resolution, that the mind be prepar'd for all events, and arm'd, and fortify'd against the worst of evils, that can befall us. To which purpose it will highly contribute, if we make these things, as much as we can, actual, and present to our thoughts, and suppose our selves at our first setting out, already incompass'd with all those difficulties, and distresses, which we may reasonably expect will afterwards assault, and set upon us in our Journey.

Under these apprehensions it was, that the prophet *David* here made, and continued, and renewed his resolutions of steadfast adherence to his God. *The wicked* (says he) *have laid a snare for me, yet I erred not from thy precepts*, v. 110, and 109. *My soul is continually in my hands* i. e. every moment ready to be snatcht out of them, *yet do I*
not

not forget thy law. Thus v. 87. *they had almost consumed me upon earth, but I forsook not thy Commandments* and v. 157. *Many are now my persecutors, and enemies, yet do I not decline from thy testimonies*

And surely he that deliberately, and entirely devotes himself to the service of religion, has forcast with himself the worst that can happen, and so is by that means ready and prepared with an undaunted resolution to encounter it. He has considered what it is, and so is well enough contented to deny himself, to renounce the friendship of the world, to smile upon the face of danger, to *hate Father and mother, brother and sister, lands and possessions* and even *life* it self rather than part with that, without which even life it self is not worthy the enjoying.

Through *honour and dishonour*, through *evil report*, and *good report*, through a red sea, and a wilderness, through watchings, and fastings, through afflictions and distresses, through dangers, and discouragements, he will press forward towards the prize of his high calling, and will neither be byast from his mark by the flattering considerations of the world, nor forc't from it by any terrors, or sufferings whatsoever.

He that frames his resolution with this prospect, will not so easily fail in the execution of it, he foresees what he must trust to, he
knows

knows the worst of it, he will not have his arms to seek, when the enemy is upon him, and so is not likely to be surprized with sudden assaults, or to be beaten off, and worsted in the conflict. And this is the method, which our Saviour took with his Disciples, and also with others, who offer'd themselves to be his proselites. He acquaints them before hand what they must look for, in divers places plainly telling them, that they must expect in this world the worst of temporal evils, that so they might be enabled to meet them with courage and resolution, and habituate their minds to entertain them. We read *Mat.* 8. 19. that a certain Scribe struck with admiration of our Saviours miracles was very earnest to become one of his Disciples. He comes to him with a very forward profession of his Zeal to serve him, *Master I will follow thee wheresoever thou goest.* Our Saviour, to try what grounds he had for such a confident resolution; informs him how mean, and contemptible his worldly condition was; *the Foxes have holes, and the Birds of the Air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* He bad him think of this, and then resolve what to doe. We do not indeed read what became of him afterwards, but from the silence of the Evangelists it is very probable, that he slunk away in the Croud, as frustrated,

frated, and disappointed in his mighty hopes, and expectations. And thus our Saviour frequently deals with those, whom he had chosen for his Disciples. *In the world ye shall have tribulation. Job. 16. 33. Ye shall be hated of all men for my name sake, Mark 13. 13.* And if this should not alwaies happen to be their lot, yet the constant resolution to undergoe this heavy task was absolutely necessary. For *Matt. 10. 24. The Disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the Disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. And if they have called the master of the house Belzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household, and v. 36. He that taketh not up his Cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* And least we should think these to be only Counsels of perfection, or particular injunctions, as some doe, and not necessary precepts, to which all Christians are obliged, our Saviour directs the same lesson to the great multitude, that follow'd him *Luke 14. v. 25. And there went great multitudes with him, and he turned, and said unto them If any man come unto me, and doth not hate his father and mother, wife, children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life, he cannot be my Disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his Cross, and come after me, he cannot be my Disciple.*

The

The necessity of this method, for the fixing a thorow resolution, he there more fully illustrates in two apposite comparisons; he that will *build a tower* must first be able to compute, and calculate the charges, and the means to defray them, otherwise to begin, being unable to make an end, is to make himself ridiculous to the world of scorers for an unadvised and foolish undertaking. A Prince likewise that will go to war, must first sit down and consult with himself, whether he be sufficiently provided with all necessaries for the expedition, *whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand*. Otherwise it will be better for him to keep peace, if he have it, or, being engaged, to get it if he can. For else he will thrust an advantage into the hands of his enemy, and procure nothing but disgrace and poverty to himself.

The conclusion of these two parables our Saviour repeats again, v. 33. *So likewise whosoever be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple*, i.e. he will never be able to hold out, and so had better never pretend to such a glorious profession. The sum of which short inference is briefly this, that ere we can upon sure grounds resolve upon a religious course, or safely proclaim war against Satan, it will be necessary to make over all interest

in our lives, or whatsoever is near and dear to us, to love all persons and things less than our Saviour, which will then appear, when we suffer none of them to make us desert his service, or flinch from our purposes, and resolutions to obey him.

When the young man in the Gospel came to Christ to shew him the way to eternal life, our Saviour replies, *sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, and follow me.* Upon this, says the text, *he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.* This soon discovered the weakness and insufficiency of his pretended resolution, that he had only cheated his own soul with a bare appearance of religion, which was not truly seated in his heart, for his heart was in his treasure, and so he could not endure to think of selling it, and entring upon a poor, and persecuted religion.

And this was the case of a great many more besides him, and has been the cause of many fearful shipwracks of faith and a good conscience to this day. This temper our Saviour has represented by the *stony ground*, in the parable of the sower *Matt. 13.* Men may receive the doctrine of the Gospel into their hearts with joy, but for want of a good soil, where it may take deep root, for want of an entire resolution to bear what-

whatsoever the Gospel requires of them, they last but a little while. For tho they seem to thrive, and flourish for a while, yet as soon as persecution arises because of the Gospel, when any chargeable duty is exacted of them, immediately they are offended, i. e. galled and discouraged from any further progress: which notes unto us, that when secular interest outweighs duty, when Christ is forsaken because of persecution, then that imaginary resolution, which men before made shew of, was not founded in the true motives of religion, which are the same at all times, nor upon any other ground, but such as is contrary to persecution, i. e. their secular interests and advantages. And then no wonder if the change of their interest alter their resolutions, and the same motive, which makes men zealous for the temple at *Jerusalem*, be at another time of equal force for the calves of *Dan* and *Bethel*.

But a true Christian resolution is built upon a fixt and immoveable foundation, that has no dependance upon times or seasons, upon fair or foul weather, and makes a man uniform and constant in his course, whatever betides him, the same in a storm as in the Sun shine, he will *receive the word with joy*, though it be also *in much affliction*. And surely that man much undervalues God, and so cannot resolve to

serve him as he ought, who deems any thing comparable to him, or fit to be considered, when he comes in competition. He that holds his body dear (says the Philosopher) must count honesty but little worth, and it is impossible that a man should earnestly fix his thoughts or settle his resolutions upon the pursuit of things above, unless he first wholly take them off from all things here below, and be indifferently affected towards all outward comforts, and complacencies. The whole of this consideration is summ'd up in that comprehensive advice of the wise man, *My son, when thou comest to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation, count the cost*, as our Saviour bids thee, forethink the worst of it, consider well what thou wilt do, when things come to the push, and this will be a great help with Gods grace and assistance, to plant such a firm resolution of piety and obedience in the bottom of thy heart, as shall enable thee to devour all difficulties, to break through all discouragements, and to hold out manfully, till thou hast finish'd thy course to the end, notwithstanding the fiercest oppositions thou shalt meet with by the way.

3. It is requisite to a well grounded resolution that it be entire and comprehensive of our whole duty, not taken up in a humour against this or that particular sin, but equally set against all

all known fins, and uniformly bent to walk in all the good ways of God, without any exception or reservation. *David* is our example here in several places of this *Psalms*. Thus v. 101. *I have refrained my self from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.* and v. 6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.* and v. 128. *Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I bate every false way.*

The Jews had entertained a corrupt notion among them, that God at the last day would put our good works and bad into the balance, and according to the heavier scale determine our condition in the world to come, so that if the most part of a mans actions were holy and just, though in others he sinn'd often, yet the greater ingredient should prevail, and the bigger number of his observances of the law, should outweigh the lesser of his deviations from it. Nay some went a great deal further, and taught, that if a man observed but one command well, it was not absolutely necessary, that he should keep the rest, and so left men at liberty to take to themselves what part of duty they pleased, and let the rest alone.

But surely a truly religious resolution is founded upon a general, and universal reason, which takes in all our concerns, and equally extends

extends it self to all sins, and duties whatsoever.

And this is one sure way to discover the strength, and soundness of mens resolutions in religion. This was the Case of *Jehu*, notwithstanding all his flourishing pretences for a thorough reformation. He made great shew for a while of Zeal for God, and his worship, and *Jonadab* must needs go along with him to see it, *Come see my Zeal for the Lord of hosts*; he destroyed *Baal*, and his worship, out of *Israel* very courageously. But he presently discovered the selfish principle that he was acted by. For he gave way to the Calves no less abominable in the sight of God, and cleav'd to the sin of *Jeroboam* the son of *Nebat*, who made *Israel* to sin.

The like was the Case of *Herod*, *Mark* 6. 20. He stood in some awe of *John*, *knowing him to be a just man, and Holy*, and because he would be esteemed religious, and would seem to respect him, he heard him often, and upon his motion did many good things, and it is like enough that he reformed many things amiss, which *John* found fault with, either in his Court, or in himself. So fair a testimony does the Evangelist give him of many specious performances in matters of religion. But no sooner was he touch't in that tender point in his *Herodias*, in his darling, his reigning sin, but the mask of a sudden falls off, and he presently discovers

covers the base and corrupt ends of his former zeal, and reformation.

There are many partial principles and ends in men, which will oblige them to abstain from some sins, and be very careful in some duties, as shame of the world, the fear of temporal punishment, and the hope of temporal advantage, the power of custom, the influence of education, their particular temper, and constitution, the affectation of popularity and natural ingenuity, the terrors of an affrighted conscience, and even the antipathy of sins, and inconsistency, that is often found between one sin, and another. But if in the mean time there be no Care nor conscience of other sins, where there appeareth no influence from these and the like considerations, the principle is still defective, we are as much under the universal reign, and dominion of sin, as ever, and are far removed from such a resolution, as will prove a solid permanent foundation of virtue and religion. For it is founded barely in particular reasons, and so has no more strength than is derived from them.

But a true resolution is uniform, absolute, and universal, free from all by and sinister respects, all concealed, and hypocritical reservations. It enables a man to abstain from sin out of an entire hatred of sin as such, and to yield

obedience to the law of God, out of a sincere esteem of the authority of the Legislator. And therefore he cannot be perswaded to pick and chuse what particular duties to observe, such as may be most for his own advantage. For he looks upon the whole law of God as one, and the same rule, impartial, constant and unvariable, and that it was given us by God to direct our actions, and not to be bow'd, and accommodated to the lusts, and interests of men.

Satan is well aware of this, and so is not much concern'd to see men observant of many duties, so long as he holds possession by one single sin. This is enough at any time to maintain his authority, and secure his interest in the Soul. He knows well enough, that the cherishing of one lust, will corrupt and vitiate all other laudable performances; that one *Achan* could bring a Curse upon the whole Congregation; that one sin is enough to ruine us; or if it were not, yet while he holds that one fast, he will quickly make way for a whole Legion to enter in.

And thus I have shown, what things are required for the forming a religious resolution. It remains that I add a word or two, of what great use and moment it is in the business of religion.

And 1st. a resolution thus framed will have a powerful influence over the whole Soul to keep
it

it fixt, and intent upon its duty, to engage all the faculties thereof to proceed immediately to act according to their respective offices, and apply, and put forth their forces with vigor and constancy for the attainment of that end, which it has fixt, and determin'd to its self.

As we see in other resolutions, when a man resolutely intends his profit, pleasure, advancement, or whatever state in this life, how doth it set the whole man at work, 'twill employ all his thoughts, his cares, his endeavors, 'tis the business of his parts, his study, his whole life to pursue it, he sticks at nothing that may promote, or further his design, he spares no pains, neglects no means that may tend to compass it, all the powers of Soul and Body, yield a cheerful obedience to this commanding resolution.

The like effect we should perceive in the business of religion, if men were but as earnest, resolute, and intent upon it, as upon their worldly advantages and satisfactions. For were our wills fixt to it, did our affections concenter in it, how eager should we be in the pursuit, how lively and vigorous in our actions, and performances. For then it would be nothing more but following the natural tendencies of our own Souls, to act suitably to our tempers and inclinations; our duty would become our choice, and our delight, and 'twould be force, and violence

lence to be drawn from it. So that if once we are arriv'd thus far, that virtue is become the matter of our firm purposes and resolutions; when the heart is set upon it, it will sweeten all our Cares, make all our labours easy and natural, breath life, and Spirit into our works and actions. For it has won the principle that commands them all, as the spring of a watch imparts a motion to all the wheels of it.

And therefore *Deut. 26. 17.* we find this to be the great argument which *Moses* presses upon the men of *Israel*. *Thou hast voucht the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his wayes, and to keep his statutes, his Commandments, and his Judgments, and to hearken to his voice.* He thought this a mighty enforcement of the obligation they lay under, that they had then resolved upon it, they had plighted their fidelity, and engaged their truth to God so, that the very shame of being false to such an avowed solemn resolution should oblige them, even in point of honour, to make it good.

For this is evident, that resolution with its own strength would be able to effect that, for want whereof the greatest part of mankind prove so often succesless in their undertakings. We see by experience the force of it in other things that it attempts, how it goes through against greater difficulties than the ways of virtue.

tue are encumbered with. And we may be sure in the present Case, that it will prosper in the thing it undertakes, and unless men have a mind to be conquered, and basely desert their resolutions, they cannot miscarry.

This will prove an effectual remedy against the main mistakes, errors, and imperfections of our lives, secure us from unsettledness, and flitting from one thing to another, and keep us stedfast in our duty, fix and fasten us to our business. It will confirm, settle, and stablish the fickleness and slipperiness of our hearts, which without this are very various and changeable, and like a ship without ballast, ready to be overturned with every wind that blows against it. It will preserve us from being faint and weary, when we meet with any unexpected obstacles in *running the race that is set before us*. It will make our conversation all of a piece, breed a constancy, and unswaydness in our lives and actions, make us firm *and immoveable* in the practice of religion, to continue and persevere in our Course, to add to *our faith vertue*, ---- and so onward, to *go from strength to strength, until we appear before God in glory*.

2d. A firm and well settled resolution, will prove a powerful preservative against Satans temptations. It will either discourage and dishearten them, or else enable us to repel them.

The Devil hath but small hope to seduce, and mislead a resolved Christian : when he discerns men in earnest to stand upon their guard, watch to avoid all opportunities and occasions, to prepare and fortify against him, there he will not stay to receive a baffle and disappointment, he will leave off soliciting, when he sees 'tis to no purpose.

And surely if we survey, and sum up all the forces which the Devil, the world, and the most dangerous enemy, our own flesh, are able to raise against us, all means and devices, stratagems and policies, whereby they continually attempt to abuse and ruine us, there is force enough in a holy resolution to frustrate and defeat them all. For it is not here as in other wars, where the bravest gallantry and resolution may be sometimes overpowered and vanquished. But in our conflict with our Spiritual enemies, we can never be conquered, as long as we hold our resolutions, unless we make a cowardly and dishonourable retreat, or shamefully consent to our own overthrow. For let the Devil do his worst, let him discourage or allure, assault and storm us, we can never be vanquished, if we will not yield. Temptation puts on its strength according to the frame and temper of our wills, and as long as we are unwilling, all the Devils in hell cannot force us
upon

upon a sin. Temptations may knock at our hearts, but they cannot enter, unless we open the doors, and let them in.

When ever therefore thou findest thy self tempted to the commission of a sin, especially thy bosom, thy beloved sin, the sin that *does so easily beset thee*, which thy Soul delights in, be assured that it comes upon Satans errand, do not treat with it, but call up all thy former Vows, Oaths, Covenants, and resolutions say, *I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed to live in obedience to my maker. How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God. Away from me ye wicked, for I will keep the commandments of my God.* I am engaged by a solemn vow, the strongest bond I can think of, and have taken a Sacrament upon it, never to admit that into my heart whereby I have been formerly betray'd.

If the devil further endeavor to fright thee with the Crosses and reproaches, that thou art hereby exposed to, that thou wilt probably suffer many things not very grateful, and pleasing to flesh and blood, say, 'tis no more then I look't for, the Cross is no scandal to me. I have sworn to *fight manfully under Christs banner, and to continue his faithful souldier, and servant, to my lives end.* I know well enough upon what terms I listed my self in his Service, and I'll not

not desert it whatsoever shall befall me. These considerations, with the assistance of Gods Grace, will by degrees work thee up into *St. Pauls* resolution, that *neither life, nor death, things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate thee from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Collect
for the
2d. Sun-
day after
Epiphany

And thou O God that knowest us to be set in the midst of so many, and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot alwaies stand upright, Grant to us such strength, and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us thro all temptations, thro Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all Honour, and Glory World without end. Amen.

F I N I S.